

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00228 061922Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0228

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, CA
SUBJ: "LET THEM EAT CAKE"

REF: QUEBEC 0209 NOTAL

1. THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT YESTERDAY (JULY 4) ENDED A MAMMOTH 5-DAY CELEBRATION SIMULTANEOUSLY COMMEMORATING THE 370TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF QUEBEC CITY BY SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN AND THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE PROVINCIAL FLEUR-DE-LYS FLAG. THE PRINCIPAL THEME AND FOCUS OF THE CELEBRATIONS WAS THE "RETURN TO THE ROOTS" (RETOUR AUX SOURCES) OF FRANCO-AMERICANS AND FRANCOPHONES FROM OTHER PARTS OF CANADA. THE "RETURN TO THE ROOTS" PROGRAM, WHICH EMPHASIZED THE ENORMOUS CONTRIBUTIONS QUEBEC AND FRANCE HAVE MADE TO NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY, TARGETTED SPECIFICALLY FRANCO-AMERICAN GROUPS IN LOUISIANA AND NEW ENGLAND AND APPEARS TO US AS THE OPENING SALVO OF A CAMPAIGN AIMED AT BUILDING A "QUEBEC LOBBY" IN THE UNITED STATES.

2. THE GOQ BUDGETED AN IMPRESSIVE 2.8 MILLION DOLLARS FOR THE FESTIVITIES, AND INVITED A LARGE NUMBER OF DIGNITARIES, PRINCIPALLY FROM THE U. S. (SEE REFTTEL). AMONG OTHER THINGS,
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00228 061922Z

THE GOVERNMENT PICKED UP THE TAB FOR TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND FEEDING OF SEVERAL FRANCO-AMERICAN GROUPS (INCLUDING A CHARTERED JET FOR A 150-STRONG LOUISIANA CONTINGENT). ACTIVITIES INCLUDED A ROCK SHOW ATTENDED BY SOME 125,000 PEOPLE FEATURING SINGERS FROM LOUISIANA, ACADIA (NEW BRUNSWICK), AND QUEBEC, WORKSHOPS AND STUDY SESSIONS ON "LIVING IN FRENCH IN AMERICA", AND ENDLESS RECEPTIONS AND BANQUETS, MOST FEATURING

RENE LEVESQUE HIMSELF FLANKED BY A SIZEABLE NUMBER OF HIS MINISTERS. IN A CEREMONY THAT SEEMS ON ITS WAY TO BECOMING OBLIGATORY EVER SINCE THE PM WAS AWARDED THE LEGION OF HONOR LAST YEAR IN FRANCE, LEVESQUE DECORATED THE LEADER OF THE LOUISIANA DELEGATION, EX-CONGRESSMAN JAMES DOMENGEAUX, WITH THE ORDER OF 3 JULY 1608, NEWLY MINTED FOR THE OCCASION. A "MODEST" PURSE OF DOLS 5,000 WENT WITH THE AWARD.

3. ALTHOUGH THE FESTIVITIES WERE BILLED AS NON-POLITICAL, THERE WERE PLENTY OF POLITICAL OVERTONES. THE GOQ CAST ITSELF AS THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF THE FRANCOPHONES IN NORTH AMERICA, AS PROOF THAT FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ARE FLOURISHING IN QUEBEC AND THAT "ASSIMILATION INTO THE NORTH AMERICAN MELTING POT," AS CAMILLE LAURIN PUTS IT, CAN BE AVOIDED. LEVESQUE SOUNDED THE MESSAGE MOST CLEARLY IN HIS CLOSING SPEECH: FRENCH MINORITIES CAN RESIST ASSIMILATION AS WE HAVE, HE SAID, AND QUEBEC WILL BE THERE TO HELP -- BUT "FRENCH MINORITIES EVERYWHERE IN AMERICA WILL BE EVEN STRONGER WHEN QUEBEC IS POWERFUL AND SOVEREIGN."

4. COMMENT: DESPITE THE GOQ'S HEAVY INVESTMENT OF FUNDS AND MINISTERIAL ENERGY, WE SEE NO SIGN THAT IT WAS GETTING ANY REAL RETURN ON ITS MONEY. ABOUT 250 FRANCO-AMERICANS SHOWED UP AS PART OF ORGANIZED GROUPS INVITED BY THE GOVERNMENT, PLUS ABOUT 20 JOURNALISTS, ALMOST ALL FROM SMALL ETHNIC-ORIENTED NEWSPAPERS IN NEW ENGLAND AND LOUISIANA. ALTHOUGH IT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00228 061922Z

IMPOSSIBLE TO GAUGE HOW MANY FRANCO-AMERICANS WERE SUBSIDIZED AND HOW MANY OTHERS VISITED QUEBEC ON THEIR OWN, IN RESPONSE TO HEAVY PUBLICITY BY THE GOQ IN U. S. NEWSPAPERS, THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS IN THE CITY APPEARED ABOUT NORMAL FOR THIS TIME OF YEAR. THE TURNOUT AMONG INVITED AMERICAN VIP'S, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS DISMAL. OF THE MANY CONGRESSMEN, SENATORS, AND GOVERNORS INVITED, ONLY THE GOVERNORS OF THE NEIGHBORING STATES OF MAINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE, AND VERMONT SHOWED UP. AS ALL THREE TOLD ME PRIVATELY, THEY CAME AS A RESULT OF STRONG URGING BY LEVESQUE HIMSELF AND AS A RESULT OF STRONG INTEREST IN THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE ENERGY DEALS WITH QUEBEC. EVEN AMONG THE FRANCO-AMERICANS WHO WERE THE OBJECT OF ALL THIS HIGH-POWERED WOOING, WE DETECTED A NUMBER OF RAISED EYEBROWS AT THE LAVISHNESS OF THE WELCOME. THERE WAS THE IMPRESSION THAT THE GOQ, FOR ALL ITS GOOD INTENTIONS, WAS SIMPLY TRYING TOO HARD. EVEN DOMENGEAUX, WHO ON PREVIOUS TRIPS TO QUEBEC HAD BEEN A VOCAL ADVOCATE OF QUEBEC SEPARATISM, CONFIDED PRIVATELY TO ME THAT HE WAS SHOCKED BY THE LAVISHNESS OF QUEBEC SPENDING OF PUBLIC FUNDS. HE COMMENTED RATHER SADLY THAT "YOU CAN'T BUY PEOPLE'S SYMPATHY." HE ALSO CONFIDED THAT HE HAS COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT TRUDEAU'S BILINGUAL POLICY IS THE BEST AND MOST GENEROUS MODEL FOR CANADA TO FOLLOW.

4. ALL IN ALL, THEN, IT WAS A WONDERFUL SHOW FOR THOSE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO PARTICIPATE. OUR GUESS IS THAT THE EFFECT AMONG FRANCO-AMERICANS WILL BE MINIMAL. MOREOVER, CONSIDERING THE ENORMOUS EXPENSES INVOLVED AND THE MANY OTHER MORE PRESSING DOMESTIC NEEDS IN QUEBEC, LEVESQUE AND HIS MINISTERS MAY BE ASKED SOME EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS ON THE USEFULNESS OF SUCH A CULTURAL ORGY SO SOON AFTER THE MINISTER OF FINANCE REFUSED INTER ALIA VIRTUALLY ALL PROPOSED INCREASES IN THE GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL AFFAIRS EXPENDITURES FOR THE COMING YEAR.

5. BY WAY OF SIDELIGHT, THE FRENCH PRESENCE AT THIS AFFIR WAS WAS NOTABLY DISCREET. ORGANIZERS OF THE FESTIVITIES HAD TOLD US LONG AGO THAT THEY WERE HOPEFUL OF A VISIT BY GISCARD, OR AT LEAST CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 QUEBEC 00228 061922Z

BY ALAIN PEYREFITTE, WHO IS REGARDED HERE AS QUEBEC'S CHAMPION IN FRANCE AND WHO HAD PROMISED TO DELIVER A NUMBER OF 17TH CENTURY CANNONS TO BE PLACED IN THE REBUILT FORTIFICATIONS IN THE RESTORED LOWER TOWN. THE CANNONS ARRIVED BUT PEYREFITTE DIDN'T. THE ONLY SENIOR FRENCH OFFICIAL IN TWON WAS MINISTER OF CULTURE JEAN-PHILIPPE LECAT ACCOMPANIED BY A BAG CARRIER FROM THE QUAI D'ORSAY.
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